

Stated Meeting, November 16, 1883.

Present, 12 members.

President, Mr. FRALEY, in the Chair.

Mr. P. C. Garrett was introduced to the presiding officer, and took his seat.

A photograph of the Chev. Damiano Muoni was received through Mr. Phillips for insertion in the album.

Letters of acknowledgment were read from the Boston Public Library (XVI, i); American Antiquarian Society (XVI, i); New Jersey Historical Society (XVI, i); United States Military Academy (XVI, i); State Historical Society of Wisconsin (XVI i.), and the University of the city of New York (113, i).

A letter of envoy was received from the Academy of Sciences at Rome.

Donations for the Library were reported from the Mining Engineers at Melbourne, Mad. C. Royer of Paris, the Geographical Commercial Society, Bordeaux; the Geological Society and Señor Goodolphim of Lisbon; London Nature; American Astronomical Society, Boston; Harvard University; Mr. Scudder, Mr. Phillips, the Brooklyn Library, the American Chemical Journal, Mr. Gatschet, the editor of Scandinavian, and the Astronomical Observatory of Mexico.

Dr. Brinton read an obituary notice of Oswald Heer, in a letter from Mr. Lesquereux to Mr. Lesley.

The death of Dr. John Lawrence Le Conte, one of the Vice-Presidents of the Society, at Philadelphia, November 15th, aged 58 years, was announced by the Secretary.*

* John Lawrence Le Conte, the son of Dr. John Le Conte, was born May 13th, 1825, in New York, and graduated at the College of Physicians and Surgeons in 1846. He traveled extensively on this continent on tours of scientific investigation. He served as surgeon and medical director in the volunteer and regular armies during the war of the Rebellion. In 1873 he was elected President of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. He was an active member of the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia. Dr. Le Conte was a son-in-law of the late Judge Grier, of the United States Circuit Court.

Mr. Lesley desired to express his feeling that while the Society has sustained a serious loss in the death of one of its estimable Vice-Presidents, science has suffered a lamentable blow by the withdrawal of one of the best investigators and one of the truest philosophers that ever did duty in her service. Not a common soldier only has fallen—not a non-commissioned officer—not a mere colonel of a single regiment in her army—but a general of high rank, a leader of forces, one who could plan and execute the manœuvres of a large and long campaign, an organizer, a ruler in her realm.

My private grief, said the speaker, at the loss of an old and intimate personal friend gives me no peculiar right to tell his virtues and abilities in this hall where he has been known and honored for so many years; but it gives me the power to speak of these virtues and abilities with the confidence of absolute knowledge. Others have known and loved him, and will regret his death, and will speak of him affectionately and respectfully inside and outside of this hall. But it was my good fortune to be one of his special companions for the past thirty years; and he often expressed the wish that if I survived him I would place on record some memorial of his life. Once, when I felt vigorous and hopeful, I promised to gratify his wish, although he was the younger of the two, and had a natural right to give what he desired to receive. But now, how is it possible to do more than say: "Le Conte is dead, the precocious youth, the affectionate son, husband, father and friend, the just and truth-loving man, the accurate and precise observer, a master in the divine art of classifying facts, a perfectly trained and nobly developed genius in science."

Le Conte is a famous name in American science. The foundations of its fame were laid by the father, and built up by the son. Both these have passed away from the eastern shore of the continent; but on its western shore two brothers, children of the father's brother, prolong and enhance the reputation of the name.

A memorial of the life of our fellow member and friend would be incomplete without a personal description of old Major Le Conte, to whose vigorous intellect, excellent common sense, and great experience in zoological studies, John owed not only his extraordinary abilities, his aptitude for mathematics, his eye for form and color, his exactness, his imagination, his love of the study of languages, his taste for historical metaphysics, and especially mythology, and his pronounced capacity for practically putting things in order and managing affairs, but also the opportunity for cultivating and displaying all these various, and, as many people vainly imagine, contradictory mental powers.

I say vainly imagine. For, it is a vulgar prejudice to suppose that a life spent in counting the number of segments and legs of bugs, and describing the microscopic foliation of their antennæ, incapacitates a man for comprehending the *Mécanique Celeste*, or the writings of Plotinus; for the enjoyment of the *Mahabahrata*, or the safe conduct of his hereditary estate. What stamps the character of Le Conte as a genius is precisely

what gives the lie to this vulgar prejudice. He was as fine a mathematician as he was minutely true with the microscope. His wide and varied learning checked any tendency to narrowness in study, and gave him a power and richness of language which reacted on his reason to enrich it with a copious store of generous and noble ideas. The infinite variety of insect forms was not more attractive to him than the infinite variety of words in the languages which he studied; nor the infinite variety of myths with which the imagination of past ages has attempted to explain, or at least to portray, the mysteries of the Universe. Will it excite surprise then in any well equipped mind, that the skill which nature gave him to arrange facts of the organic world, relationships of numbers, and the ideas of men, availed him quite as well in the leasing of his father's storehouses in New York, the reorganization of the wards of an army hospital, and the conduct of the business of the United States Mint?

All this went together, and comes quite natural to a superior genius. It matters little what the man regarded as work, and what he regarded as play; his work was creation and recreation in one, and his recreation was all good work. Every hobby a true genius mounts becomes under his management a trained war-horse or sagacious hunter. The contradictory occupations of such a man would be a reproach to less gifted mortals; but in the career of such a man they are merely alternately diverging and converging careers of usefulness. The recognition of this truth by Major Le Conte was gratefully acknowledged by his son in narrating such anecdotes as the following:

Young Le Conte was put to school at St. Mary's College, in Georgetown, D. C. The discipline of the class-room was very strict. Everybody was kept to silent study; none could leave his seat without command or permission. The Major visited the school to learn how John was getting on. The master said that he was good and diligent, but regretted to add that he was too much interested in a sort of knowledge which lay apart from his regular studies. He hoped that the father would endeavor to repress these inclinations in his boy. The Major asked the master what they were. The master replied—a love of birds and bugs, shells and stones, in fact, everything that grew, or moved in the air, on the ground, or in the water. If he indulged in such pursuits he would never excel as a mathematician or linguist. “Is my son behindhand then in his studies?” asked the father. “No,” replied the master, “he recites well, and is as good a scholar as the best of them; but we wish him to excel all the rest, as he evidently might do if he gave his undivided attention to the studies of his class.”

“I am not of that opinion,” quoth the Major, with the twinkle in his eye for which he was famous among his cronies—all now dead—“I am not at all of that opinion, and I must request that you will not discourage my son in obtaining a kind of knowledge which I have myself pursued all my life, and which I believe will make all the other kinds of learning which John will get here all the more useful and noble.”

The good sense which prompted this request from the side of the father, prompted the master also to grant it, and thenceforward the young naturalist, while being subjected to the same rigid discipline, was not repressed in his inclinations for extra scholastic investigation, on a small scale.

One day silence reigned in the school-room. Everybody was conning his task at his seat. The tutor was silently reading at his desk. Suddenly there was a great fracas—John Le Conte was seen starting from his seat and scrambling on the floor in the middle of the room. He was called up to the tutor's desk to give an account of himself. He held in his hand two beetles. He explained that they were rare, that he could not help trying to catch them, that he had to be quick about it, that he did not know that he would make such a noise, etc. The other scholars in great excitement sat expecting dolorous consequences for John. But they were disappointed. The tutor remembered the Major, or perhaps had received orders from the upper region. He merely sent the boy back to his seat with his beetles, and a warning not to make so much noise another time.

But he received less mercy from his schoolmates. One holiday the boys were on an excursion in Frederick county. John captured two remarkably fine and rare coleopterids—I forget their name, but he always gave it when he told the story—and put them into a pill-box. At night two of his companions stole the box, threw the bugs away, neatly substituted two quids of tobacco, and returned the box to its place without detection. Great was John's grief at the discovery. But he never thought on any kind of revenge. He did not know enough Horace then to comfort himself with the barren consideration, that *Quid quisque vitet nunquam homini satis cautum est in horas*; but he thought it all the same, in a schoolboy's way, and learned by this experience to keep his shiny-backed pets out of the reach of profane fingers. Dr. Horn can best describe to us the care he took of his great collections.

Le Conte loved to tell such personal stories of his early life, and during the week preceding his death his mind lived entirely in those remote years. He laughed heartily to himself at the recollection of his adventures. He wished to have them published. Why? Was he vain? He was the reverse of vain; he was a man singularly free from vanity. Why should he have had so set a desire to be memorialized after death? I answer without a shade of hesitation, because he had inherited a loving disposition, had led an affectionate and sympathetic life, and wished above all things to retain forever his kind and good relations with his fellow-men. His love of his kind was strong. His sympathy with his fellow-workers in science was not only strong but unalloyed with baser sentiments. Even when his fine scorn of fraud, duplicity, pretension and untruthfulness evoked denunciation, I never knew him to depreciate any kind of talent. He was exceedingly just to just men, and generous towards those who had not had talents or opportunities sufficient to give them distinction. He honored the old and loved the young. He honored the masters and loved the students of science. He worshiped the shade of his father, and never spoke

of himself and his own attainments and accomplishments as anything more than an effort to follow in the footsteps of him who had given him the ability and opportunity to do so.

I dwell principally upon the moral qualities of our departed friend, because I trust that the Society will obtain a complete account of his scientific abilities from Dr. Horn, who has been first his pupil and then his collaborator for twenty odd years. Let us place on our records that memorial of a blameless career in science, and its application to the uses of human existence.

For myself I can only speak of what fills my heart to the exclusion of all other thoughts—of the lovable nature of the friend whom we shall never again see. Let the world reverence his memory as a discoverer, as a philosopher, as a genius. I can only remember John Le Conte as an engaging friend, a faithful friend, a speaker of the truth, a judicious adviser, a companion to think with, a reliable coadjutor to deal with, but still, above all, as a most affectionate and trustworthy friend.

I place above all his other exceptionally shining qualities his affectionateness. He was a lover; and all the world loves a lover. But good lovers are said to be good haters. I doubt the truth of the saying. Selfish lovers may be good haters, but the perfect lover is incapable of any hate that deserves the appellation. Le Conte was one of the men who liked to be called John. He had a regularly woman's heart. And yet he could not hate anybody. When he tried, he simply made himself ridiculous. I have often laughed at his wrath; it would no more counterfeit real hatred than a crystal of smoky quartz can counterfeit charcoal. His innate lucidity of good nature could not be veiled; it was as if a cherub knit its brows. And this innate good nature, allying him with the universe, was the salvation of his science, for it protected his mind against those damaging and delaying passions which futilize the career of men of talent, hough their horses and steal the linchpins from their chariot-wheels.

Lovingly he lived and worked many, many years—as many as were good for him. The world wants us all; and yet needs none of us. It is of no great consequence who is who, or what or how much any one does. What one leaves another takes; what one begins, some one else is sure to finish. But surely the memory of a friend is blessed, and such a friend as has just left us can never be forgotten.

Memoir of John L. LeConte, M.D. By George H. Horn, M.D.

(Read before the American Philosophical Society, December 7, 1883.)

John Lawrence LeConte was born in New York City, May 13, 1825, and died in Philadelphia, November 15, 1883. He was the son of Major John Eatton LeConte and Mary A. H. Lawrence. When but a few weeks old his mother died, and the father thenceforth seemed to live solely for the